# USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

# COMMAND AND CONTROL OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

by

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#### ABSTRACT

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Since the end of World War II, the military and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have shared operating space. Although in existence since the mid to late 1800's, nongovernmental organizations, or relief organizations as they were more commonly known, and military operations did not overlap. The military conducted wars, and NGOs came in and relieved the human suffering caused by events either prior to war or because of war. Each organization formed opinions of the other and generally avoided each other. This was the status quo until the late 1980's. The US military deployed to places like Somalia and Rwanda to assist in humanitarian operations and to Afghanistan and Iraq to conduct more conventional military operations. Across the spectrum of military operations, soldiers increasing find themselves sharing an area of operations (AOR) with one or more NGOs. NGOs are important players in the international community. Coordination of all participants in a crowded and often complex environment is important to ensure the military accomplishes its mission as prescribed by the President. It is equally important that NGOs are positioned to safely and effectively achieve their humanitarian objectives. Both the U.S. military and the bulk of the NGO community appreciate the necessity for some form of communication and coordination. The current situation has multiple independent agencies and organizations operating in complex, often violent, civil-military operations and competing for information, infrastructure and influence over the local population. These organizations are interdependent yet operate independently in the same space. The military and Nongovernmental organizations must continue to educate each other on their operational methods, their sensitivities, and their expectations of the other during operations. The U.S. government must develop structures and practices to properly coordinate NGO-military relations in the various circumstances in which they find themselves involved.



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### COMMAND AND CONTROL OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Since the end of World War II, the military and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have shared operating space. Although in existence since the mid to late 1800's, nongovernmental organizations, or relief organizations as they were more commonly known, and military operations did not overlap. The military conducted wars, and NGOs came in and relieved the human suffering caused by events either prior to war or because of war. Each organization formed opinions of the other and generally avoided each other. This was the status quo until the late 1980's. The US military deployed to places like Somalia and Rwanda to assist in humanitarian operations and to Afghanistan and Iraq to conduct more conventional military operations. Across the spectrum of military operations, soldiers increasing find themselves sharing an area of operations (AOR) with one or more NGOs. NGOs are important players in the international community. In many cases they enter a developing state teetering on humanitarian disaster and provide enough aid to keep the state from collapsing. "They are vital to the victims of complex humanitarian emergencies. Because they serve as implementing partners and as service deliverers, NGOs are ultimately vital to the achievement to U.S. political and military goals." Coordination of all participants in a crowded and often complex environment is important to ensure the military accomplishes its mission as prescribed by the President. It is equally important that NGOs are positioned to safely and effectively achieve their humanitarian objectives. "In today's world ... the military aspects of a problem, and the humanitarian aspects of a problem, are wrapped together like a pretzel, and it's awfully difficult to unravel." Both the U.S. military and the bulk of the NGO community appreciate the necessity for some form of communication and coordination. At the end of the day, both organizations would agree that a coordination cell that reaches laterally to both communities would best preserve the NGO desire to remain impartial and the U.S. military's need to stay out of the business of NGO Command and Control.

The current situation has multiple independent agencies and organizations operating in complex, often violent, civil-military operations and competing for information, infrastructure and influence over the local population. These organizations are interdependent yet operate independently in the same space. The military resolves this internally through the principle of command and control. In a military operation, the Commander designates the priority of support and all support efforts are focused to the unit(s) executing the most important missions. During different phases of each operation, a Commander prioritizes the unit(s) receiving support. This model, if applied to NGO-military operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) would have

allowed the person in charge to designate humanitarian operation as a priority in southern Iraq, military operations in central and northern Iraq, and nation building in Baghdad. The military model cannot work with U.S. military and NGOs because there is no one in charge of both organizations. "Even when organizations are competent and nonpartisan, we must always remember that they are not part of the military; they do not necessarily have similar organizational objectives; and they are not responsible for the achievement of U.S. military of political goals."

The U.S. military, U.S. government agencies, and NGOs are interdependent and must begin to establish structures and practices that reflect this truth. Until a watershed event occurs to force the U.S. government to analyze this situation, there will not be formalized procedures for NGO-U.S. military and U.S. government coordination. This paper will examine nongovernmental organizations, the complexity of their relationship with the military, and how to improve the existing coordination of NGOs during crisis operations.

# WHY WE NEED BETTER COORDINATION

Relations between NGOs and the U.S. military have improved enormously over the past twenty years and will continue to improve, with or without better procedures or guidelines. Better coordination benefits the NGO, and the military, but most importantly, it also benefits the population both organizations are trying to help. An example of how proper coordination between military and NGOs could have both relieved human suffering and helped the military during OIF follows. It was shortly after coalition forces crossed into Iraq that Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) considered the UK sector including the area around Safwan to be in Phase IV, post conflict operations. While U.S. combat forces were still fighting to the north and west of the area, the UK forces were beginning stability and security operations in the vicinity of Basra. Logistic distribution convoys made daily distribution to combat forces north of the UK sector. In order to reach even the southern most coalition supply point, Tallil Airbase, the convoys had to travel through Safwan. During the initial days following the arrival of US/UK forces, the Iraqis lined the road watching and sometimes begging for food and water. As time went on the Iraqis became more emboldened; passive observation and smiles turned into aggressive gestures and angry chants. Adult men with hungry children and no means to support their families were desperate. Soon children were used to slow down convoys so Iragis could loot them, shots were fired at truck tires to disable the vehicles. Eventually, a child was hit and killed. The situation quickly deteriorated to a dangerous clash of wills—soldiers willing to do

anything to get supplies forward and Iraqis willing to do anything to stop them. This could have been alleviated if an NGO had been in the area quickly to provide food, water, or simply hope.

# WHAT ARE NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS?

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are "private, self-governing, not-for-profit organization dedicated to alleviating human suffering; and/or promoting education, health care, economic development, environmental protection, human rights, and conflict resolution; and/or encouraging the establishment of democratic institutions and civil society." Simply put, an NGO is a group of people with similar interests and a desire to contribute to the greater good of human kind. There are about 16,000 NGOs operating worldwide. NGOs vary greatly in how they are organized, funded, and accomplish their goals. Some NGOs are faith based, others focus on a specific need such as feeding the hungry or providing medical support, yet others are more broadly focused.

Larger international NGOs and most U.S. based NGOs are organized with a charter and set goals and objectives. There is a board of directors at the national level that arranges funding and sets the direction of the organization. Most NGOs are loosely organized below the top level; they practice decentralized execution at the field level. NGO representatives in the field are often young, idealistic aid workers who operate with little or no guidance and frequently rely on local hires for labor, identification of need, and sometimes protection. It is widely believed that this close coordination with the local populace is a double-edged sword. Cooperation enables the NGO worker to act as an advocate for the population, which in turn could result in increased international attention, aid, and funding. It also creates an environment in which the NGO worker becomes too narrowly focused on his area and impartial to the negative effects of aid provided to the black market or to a population whose suffering is less than their neighbors.

# **FUNDING**

Funding is a major issue in the NGO community and could potentially be used as incentive to induce some NGOs to engage in better coordination with government or military entities in a crisis. Each NGO has a different funding stream—government, private or corporation—and a different standard for their degree of obligation to the donor. "Every NGO is accountable to its donor constituency and headquarters personnel, who establish the NGO's priorities and fund the programs the NGO undertakes in cooperation with the host country's government." In discussing how NGOs decide policies and locations of humanitarian relief David Reiff states, "The difficulty was compounded by the fact that few agencies today either

choose to or are in a position to refuse contracts from donors or the UN. And this trend towards seeing themselves as, in effect, subcontractors for major donors has only increased since human rights considerations began to be incorporated ..... into the plans and programs of the mainline NGOs." A major concern of accepting donor money from governments is the perception that the NGO will no longer be impartial and that the NGO is in effect acting as an instrument of the government. Some NGOs restrict their funding to private donations only, others accept money from the international community, and many U.S. NGOs accept government funding. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a major dispenser of money to NGO's. Although technically it reports to the U.S. Department of State, USAID is perceived by many to be a fair organization. "For U.S. NGOs, the percentage of organizational funds received from the U.S. government may be as much as 80 percent." 8

# **CORE VALUES**

One thing NGOs have in common with the military is that they believe in their cause of providing aid to relieve human suffering. They are dedicated to carrying out the goals of their organization and, at least at the field level, will not use aid as a means to achieve a national or political goal. Because of this desire to separate themselves from a national or political agenda, it is extremely important that NGOs present an impartial, altruistic face to the international community, particularly to those who are receiving aid. NGOs are the experts at providing relief. They have a level of expertise the military will never have and thus are crucial to increased stability in a crisis area of operations. NGOs have experience in obtaining large quantities of food or medical supplies. Their networks of aid workers often allow them to respond to crisis faster and more appropriately than a government agency or military organization.

There is a political element to the NGO. While the military and some NGOs would like to believe that the role of the NGOs is purely to relieve human suffering or to develop a prosperous and democratic society, NGO involvement sometimes boils down to politics—at every level. Chris Seiple wrote, "This observation is particularly important for Americans who enjoy thinking that a starving child has no politics but are reluctant to understand that his food now does. In fact, every dimension of humanitarian intervention-and every issue of our new security environment, for that matter-is equally political as it requires a multi-partner response. The U.S. military's relationship with the NGOs is no exception."

# **MILITARY INTEREST**

If left to their own devices, the military would prefer to confine operations to core competency of fighting the nation's wars and to leave the nation building and humanitarian

actions to NGOs and the State Department. Unfortunately, that is not the world in which we live. The U.S. military has engaged and will continue to engage in operations that involve some form of nongovernmental organizational activity. "Within the US military almost no one welcomes this reality, but many recognize that peacekeeping, policing, and yes, nation-building are now the expected military tasks." <sup>10</sup> It is in the military's best interest to welcome the NGOs and to assist them in establishing their distribution networks and bases of operations that allow them to function more efficiently. During post conflict activities the military expectation is to transition traditional post-conflict activities to NGOs and government agencies. <sup>11</sup> The sooner the NGOs and governmental organizations are settled and fully operational, the sooner the military can redeploy.

# TYPES OF OPERATIONS

The nature of this NGO-military relationship and interaction depends on three things: the type of crisis operation, the NGO activity, and the organization in charge of the overall conduct of the operation. The U.S military tends to view its involvement as either war or Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). Joint Pub 3.0 states, "MOOTW encompass a wide range of activities where the military instrument of national power is used for purposes other than the large-scale combat operations usually associated with war." MOOTW range from Combating Terrorism to Foreign Humanitarian Assistance to Support to Counterinsurgency. Recent examples of NGO military interaction are during MOOTW operations. OIF is an example of a war that should have included more aggressive NGO involvement much earlier than it actually occurred.

Relief organizations, USAID and even the United Nations lump NGO involvement under one type of action, complex humanitarian emergencies or more commonly referred to as complex emergencies. Andrew Natsios defines complex emergency as having the following five characteristics:

Civil conflict that is rooted in traditional ethnic, tribal and religious animosities and accompanied by widespread atrocities;

Deterioration of national governmental authority to a point where public services disappear. Political control is passed to warlords, provincial governors over whom the central government has "lost control", and occasionally primordial or local-level traditional leader;

Mass population movements as a result of the desire/need to escape civil and political conflict and the necessity for food and water;

A disturbed or destroyed economy that suffers from hyperinflation and destruction (or complete devaluation of currency, large declines in the gross national product, depression-level unemployment, and the full collapse of markets:

A general decline in food security (possibly the result of or exacerbation of drought), which quickly leads to severe malnutrition that may quickly lead to massive starvation.<sup>13</sup>

NGO's, no matter what initiated the crisis, view their work as humanitarian. Military involvement, even in MOOTW operations, has an element of violence and always aims to achieve a political objective. The military views NGO involvement as a part of its war or MOOTW or post conflict operations, and NGOs view the military as part of their humanitarian relief operations.

NGO humanitarian activity varies depending on the organization. "The work NGOs do in conflict zones can be grouped into four major activities: humanitarian assistance; human rights; civil-society and democracy building; and conflict resolution.<sup>14</sup> NGO-military interface most often occurs during humanitarian assistance. Although there is potential for interaction during all types of NGO activity when the NGO is working in a military operating space.

The ease of coordination will depend on the nation and which agency of that nation is in charge of the overall conduct of operations. If the operation is a United Nations operation, the NGOs will coordinate with a Humanitarian Assistance Office and follow UN operating guidelines. If the operation is a multinational operation with the U.S. as lead nation, it is likely that the U.S. military will be in charge. A U.S.-only operation could also be headed up by the U.S. Department of State.

# NGO-U.S. MILITARY

Until Operation Iraqi Freedom, NGOs interacted with the US military within the context of a peacekeeping or humanitarian operation, never during a war.

And without this necessary consciousness of the horror of war—even of just wars that decent people are likely to support – it is as if many humanitarians do not go far beyond contrasting the military's wealth of resources and its logistical reach with their own perennially under funded, under-resourced condition. As a result, instead of seeing warriors, relief workers too often see little more than armed humanitarian logisticians in the field.<sup>15</sup>

NGOs are responsible not only to their donor base and their conscience, but they also adhere to the United Nations suggested Key Concepts For Use of Military/Civil Defence Resources (MCDA). Among other concepts, the guidelines strongly advise against using military in support of humanitarian operations. The guidelines list use of military forces only as a

last resort and suggest the use of military forces must be accompanied by clearly stated time limit and exit strategy.

One thing the military has that the NGOs can never match is planning capability, security forces, and overwhelming logistic assets. Many operations are dangerous for NGOs. Military forces can stabilize an area so that the NGOs can safely enter and distribute aid, or military forces could provide convoy escorts for aid distribution. Although most NGOs have a fairly mature distribution network, they cannot match the logistic assets of the military. The ability of NGOs to import aid to a nation or region surrounded by unfriendly terrain or neighbors is very limited. It is in that situation that military airlift, sealift, and ground transportation are an important asset to distribution of aid.

The military would like to take advantage of NGO sources of information. This might provide a more rounded view of the operational area and could help define the problem for the military. NGOs are likewise anxious to take advantage of U.S. and foreign intelligence and satellite information.

Providing intelligence from national sources, military or civil, could be a great asset to relief agencies attempting to respond to emergency situation or understand rapidly developing conflicts. There are recent examples of such information being provided to the UN and it has been seen that the creation of a coordination mechanism on the ground, such as a CMOC, greatly facilitates information sharing.<sup>16</sup>

Once again, sharing information between the military and NGOs seems like a good idea on the surface, but it could jeopardize both parties. Either through a perception of partiality that could damage the effectiveness of the NGO or through the inadvertent release of information to a local NGO hire that could end up with a bad actor and thus work against the goals of the military. NGOs need their credibility and the military does not want to feed the bad guys.

There is an oft-repeated military adage; "when in charge, take charge." If command and control of NGOs during crisis operations is left to the military, NGOs will be expected to do the military's (and by extension the nation's) bidding. Chris Seiple put this best when he wrote, "If the military is in charge, then it is responsible for the endstate of the response. It is in the military's interest to not be in charge, to not be responsible for end-state, and to focus on its end-date as one supporting component of an overall effect." Rather than being in charge, the military only has to be aware of NGO locations, actions, and capabilities.

# COORDINATION

Frequent exposure to NGO workers and humanitarian operations has improved military-NGO relations, but there are still recent examples of botched coordination. There were reports of U.S. soldiers engaged in humanitarian work wearing civilian clothes but obviously acting on behalf of the military. This behavior on the part of the military jeopardized the civilian humanitarian workers. Aid groups also complained that "the military's 'civil affairs' units, underresourced but eager to put a benign face on the U.S. presence, conducted small scale relief work of their own—air dropping food here, rebuilding a school there—that did little to improve the situation but much to confuse it."<sup>18</sup>

### HOW COORDINATION SHOULD WORK

There are multiple forms of organized coordination. The coordination model used depends on which organizations are involved in the operation. In many cases, an existing humanitarian situation precipitates the complex humanitarian emergency. Oftentimes, NGOs, UN agencies, and the US State Department are in theater and providing relief and the US military need only plug into an existing infrastructure. If the operation is more military than relief or if the US military is on site first, than the military will establish the coordination structure.

When the United Nations is the lead agency in an operation, or even if they are simply in theater, they will set up a coordination cell. Many thought that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) would be the appropriate lead. "OCHA was established in response to donor dissatisfaction with the inability of the UN system and international NGOs to coordinate their activities in the crises accompanying the Gulf War...." In practice, OCHA has never functioned as an on-scene coordination cell, and according to multiple sources, was never adequately funded or staffed to do so. A United Nations organization that has coordinated NGO activity in recent operations is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Experiences in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Rwanda demonstrated the UNHCR as a major player in the relief assistance arena. In fact, the UNHCR budget was \$1 billion in 2000.

In situations where the primary response was NGOs sponsored by the US State

Department, USAID will coordinate the distribution of relief and the NGOs. "When a complex emergency arises, and when directed to do so, the USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster

Assistance (OFDA), which is part of the Bureau for Humanitarian Response, provides foreign disaster assistance and coordinates the U.S. Governments response."

When required, OFDA will send out a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to assess the situation, make recommendations and when appropriate, act as a coordination cell between NGOs, affected country and the military.

Coordination between NGOs and other government agencies and the US military is conducted through the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC). The CMOC is the military's means for coordination with the local populace. The CMOC is comprised of military, predominantly Army, with special skills such as logistics, civil engineering, medical specialties and legal skills. The CMOC is where NGOs and other participating organizations can go to request military assistance or to receive and provide information. The Bosnia Stabilization Forces (SFOR) CJ4 staff routinely reported excess transportation capacity to the CMOC to allow the CMOC to commit truck assets to NGO or other humanitarian efforts. Even nations that have achieved a certain level of stability can experience a disastrous event that would be insignificant in a truly stable nation. A heavy rainfall creates floods, displaced persons, and a requirement for tents and cots, and cold weather creates an unpredicted requirement for fuel. The military can provide immediate relief and coordination for that relief is through the CMOC. The CMOC is the single conduit between civilian organizations and the military. Coordination at the operations level often equals cooperation and results in the CMOC receiving information that becomes useful to military operations.

### **HOW IT WORKED**

James Fallows chronicles an example of good NGO-interagency-military planning gone bad in an article for the Atlantic Monthly titled "Blind into Baghdad." An incredible planning effort involving the CIA, the State Department, the Army, the Marine Corps and the USAID was undertaken in preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom. In an attempt to ensure smooth transition from decisive operations to post conflict operations and by extension improve the military-NGO coordination, the U.S. State Department convened a working group named Future of Iraq Project.<sup>25</sup> "In September (2002) the United States Agency for International Development began to think in earnest about its postwar responsibilities in Iraq. It was the natural contact for nongovernmental organizations from the United States and other countries that were concerned with relief efforts in Iraq."26 Fallows continues the story with a comments from Andrew Natsios, USAID administration, who discussed the development of the NGO planning efforts from September 2002. Mr. Natsios had "about a dozen relief organizations and NGOs ... gathering each week at USAID headquarters for routine coordination meetings .... In October 2002, the meetings were recast as the Iraq Working Group."27 Planning took an unexpected turn when in late January, Jay Garner, a retired Army Lieutenant General was appointed the head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) to oversee the reconstruction of Iraq. Mr. Garner reported to the Secretary of Defense, thus making the reconstruction effort a

military mission and essentially putting control of all relief operations and agencies under military control.

The consequences of this action certainly contributed to the lack of coordination of humanitarian aid available in Iraq during decisive operations and the initial stages of post conflict operations. It also sent ripples throughout the NGO community, not all of them bad. Despite much NGO hand wringing and threats of non-support, many NGOs participated in providing relief support to Iraq. According to a statement issued by InterAction "the Administration's efforts to marginalize the State Department and force nongovernmental organization to operate under DoD jurisdiction complicates our ability to help the Iraqi people and multiplies the dangers faced by relief workers in the field." InterAction asserted that "US military coordination of relief efforts would undermine the impartiality and neutrality of international organizations, placing their workers under suspicion of being an arm of the military." In the end, "the NGOs decided to acquiesce in US military coordination, take US money and, in the words of an InterAction official, 'just hope for the best'."

# RECOMMENDATION

The most important thing both NGOs and the U.S. military can do is to continue to educate each other on their operational methods, their sensitivities, and their expectations of the other during operations. The challenge is to develop a stable of officers and NCOs that has experience working with NGOs and that are comfortable with doing so. We must educate the NGO communities to the advantages of coordinating with the military, and target incentives at those NGOs that are less likely to cooperate with a structured coordination cell.

An excellent model for operational planning was the USAID-InterAction planning conducted prior to OIF. Multiple articles cited this planning forum as agreeable to NGOs. Although NGOs would prefer not to be associated with a particular nation, the NGOs in InterAction agreed prior planning was the best way to avoid large scale humanitarian disaster and the best use of NGO skills. U.S. Department of State and military civil affairs personnel must be some of the first in theater—not the last—and must continue to be involved in military planning throughout all phases of the operation.

There must be some form of a coordination center in theater as soon as the operation commences. The function of this center is only to coordinate, not direct NGO activity. The organization that is in charge of the overall operation establishes the coordination center and sets the parameters of involvement. It is best if NGOs are not expected to coordinate with the military, but there will be occasions when that is necessary. If the U.S. military is in charge of

the operation, such as the early stages of post-conflict operations, they have the right to deny entry to an area or region to any NGO or other governmental agency. Coordination center responsibility would shift from military to USAID or UN control as the mission changes or as the UN or USAID enter the operation.

Most NGOs accept the UN coordination center as a neutral party. If the UN is not in theater, USAID is the next best organization to operate the coordination center. U.S. military civil affairs units should be the last resort to operate the coordination center. NGOs should be encouraged to register with the coordination center. In past operations, only NGOs that registered with the local Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) or Humanitarian Assistance Officer (HAO) received military assistance. Included in the term military assistance are security of relief supplies, access to U.S. distribution assets, and access to U.S. information sources. Any organization receiving funding from the U.S. government will be required to coordinate their activities with the coordination center. While NGOs as a group have vehemently opposed this in the past, OIF provided a precedent for NGO subordination to U.S. military control. In principle, all NGOs will rebel against this idea, but in practice, most will acquiesce.

Most of all, the U.S. government must develop structures and practices to properly coordinate NGO-military relations in the various circumstances in which they find themselves involved. A 2002 paper by InterAction called for an improved U.S. foreign aid program. The paper alleged, "increased fragmentation of resources and responsibilities, confusion externally about who is in charge, and a loss of coherence in the field as multiple federal agencies pursue similar goals with little coordination."<sup>31</sup> That situation can not continue.

WORD COUNT=4586

# **ENDNOTES**

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  <sup>21</sup> Daniel L. Byman, "Uncertain Partners: NGOs and the Military," *Survival*, Summer 2001, 102.
  <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 19. The UNHCR is also the recipient of two Nobel Peace Prizes.
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  - <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
  - 30 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> InterAction, "Foreign Assistance in Focus: Emerging Trends," 2002; available from http://www.interaction.org/campaign/Emerging\_trends.html; Internet; accessed 19 Feb 2004.

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